

Comparing Secondary Sources

The Rise of Political Parties

In his farewell address, George Washington warned against the rising tide of political differences that appeared to be tearing the new nation apart. Were political parties inevitable? What were the real differences between Hamilton's Federalists and Jefferson's Republicans? Below are two interpretations. Historian John Garraty, author of *The American Nation*, explains why the battles between these two parties were so bitter in those early years. Historian Carl Degler and the authors of *The Democratic Experience* analyze the differences between the two parties. Read these two interpretations and answer the questions that follow.

John Garraty's Interpretation

The personal nature of early American political controversies goes far toward explaining why the party battles of the era were so bitter. . . . The United States, even to its most ardent supporters, was still very much an experiment; leaders who sincerely proclaimed their own devotion to its welfare suspected that their opponents wanted to undermine its institutions. Federalists genuinely feared that the Jeffersonians sought a dictatorship based on mob rule, Democratic Republicans that the Hamiltonians hid "under the mask of Federalism hearts devoted to monarchy."

The growing controversy over the French Revolution and the resulting war between France and Great Britain widened the split between parties. After the radicals in France executed Louis XVI and instituted the Reign of Terror, American conservatives were horrified. The Jeffersonians, however, continued to defend the Revolution. . . .

This created an explosive situation. Enthusiasm for a foreign country might tempt Americans, all unwittingly, to betray their own.

Interpretation by Carl Degler, et al.

Fundamentally, they reflected two different opinions about the qualities of human nature. Hamiltonians were acutely aware of the "imperfections, weaknesses, and evils of human nature"; they believed that if men were fit to govern themselves at all, it must only be under rigid controls imposed on them by society and government. Jeffersonians, on the other hand, believed that men were by inclination rational and good; that if they were freed from the bonds of ignorance, error, and repression, they might achieve real progress toward an ideal society. . . .

The Federalists . . . believed that leadership in society belonged to a trained, responsible, and (very likely) wealthy class which could be trusted to protect property as well as human rights.

The Jeffersonian Republicans . . . believed in the leadership of what Jefferson called a "natural aristocracy," founded on talent and intelligence rather than on birth, wealth, or station. Most Republicans believed that human nature . . . was naturally trustworthy and that it could be improved through freedom and education.

1. Why, according to Garraty, were early political battles so bitter? What role does he see international politics playing in this division between parties?
2. Carl Degler and his co-authors write that the differences between the two parties "reflected two different opinions about the qualities of human nature." What, according to the authors, were each party's opinions?
3. **Analysis.** From Carl Degler's interpretation, would you conclude that the Jeffersonian Republicans believed in "rule by the mob"? Explain your answer.
4. **Synthesis.** From your knowledge of the Federalists and the Republicans, and these two interpretations, do you think that it was inevitable that Americans would split into political parties? Explain.